

# **For away players Tynecastle is one of the most daunting places to come and play**

**As fans begin to return to outdoor stadia across Scotland, one stadium in particular seems to have something about it when at full capacity, that others in the country don't.**

Tynecastle is unique due to how close the fans are to the pitch. For home players it can be a fantastic atmosphere to play in, but for away players it can be very different.

3,000 Hearts fans were at Tynecastle to see Jamie Walker sink Inverness on Sunday. The club are expecting to be able to welcome more Jambos for Celtic's visit on Saturday as Scotland continues its roadmap out of lockdown.

Assistant Co-Manager, Lee McCulloch believes an extra few thousand Jambos in Tynecastle on Saturday will make all the difference.

McCulloch said: "I've always said for away players it's one of the most daunting places to come and play. I always thought that throughout my career.

"I've not experienced being in the dugout with a full house. I'm desperate to experience that and as we all know the fans can work as a 12th man with the stands being so close to the pitch. They can really influence the away team and more

importantly our team.

“It takes a different mentality to play here because the expectation levels are so high. Sometimes with a square or backwards pass they are frustrated; they can get on your back, and it’s having that mentality to go and get on the ball again.

“Then again for the opposition it is really hard and hopefully we can get full houses back as soon as possible because the fans make such a good atmosphere.”



Premier Sports Cup – Heart of Midlothian v Inverness Caledonian Thistle  
25/7/2021.

Hearts play host to Inverness Caledonian Thistle in the Premier Sports Cup at tynecastle Park, Edinburgh, Midlothian. Pic shows: Hearts’ midfielder, Gary Mackay-Steven, holds off Inverness Caley centre forward, Manny Duku.

Credit: Ian Jacobs

Tynecastle always seems to have a special atmosphere when Hibs, Celtic, Rangers or Aberdeen are in town, especially at an evening game ‘under the lights.’

“It would have been rocking if it was a full house”, McCulloch said. “I dare say so would Sunday for the Inverness game. It’s the passion the fans have for the club. The sooner the fans get back the better for everybody and I know the players are desperate to get them back as well.”

Full capacity at outdoor stadia was initially indicated for 9 August 2021 by First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon with Scotland expected to move beyond level 0 on that date.

Hearts’ opening game of the season against Celtic and an away trip to St Mirren the following weekend take place before that date, but after that, full capacity is expected, and McCulloch can’t wait to get started.

He said: "The league campaign will be exciting, obviously we're taking a step up from last season.

"With Dundee coming up you've got the Dundee derby, the Edinburgh derby, which is the two most important derbies for me anyway!"

It is shaping up to be a competitive league as usual in the Scottish Premiership and McCulloch believes Scottish football isn't talked about enough in Europe and deserves more respect.

He said: "It's great for the neutral, that competitiveness and it makes it harder for every team that is striving for top six. It will be interesting. St Johnstone were flying last season, two cup finals so I think it's a real, real competitive league and one we're looking forward to.

"Especially with the last year everyone has had, if we can get the fans in sooner rather than later then I think for everybody it's promoting Scottish football and the competitiveness is back there.

"Solely on competitiveness, the tempo, the pressing of the opposition, I think it's one of the hardest leagues in Europe from only the aspects I talk about – the intensity and the tempo as which it's played.

"I think it's a fantastic league and it does not get spoken about around Europe enough."



Premier Sports Cup – Heart of Midlothian v Inverness Caledonian Thistle

25/7/2021.

Hearts play host to Inverness Caledonian Thistle in the Premier Sports Cup at tynecastle Park, Edinburgh, Midlothian. Pic shows: Hearts' attacking midfielder, Jamie Walker, is mobbed by teammates after scoring what proved to be the winning goal in the 75th minute.

Credit: Ian Jacobs